Bingo With a

By Lt. Nick Good

After another failed try at landing on the boat in challenging conditions, I sucked up my gear and committed to a bingo profile. I yelled at myself for several miserable landing attempts and started working through the fuel numbers. I showed myself on deck with a little more than a 2.0; little did I know my night just was beginning.

After checking out with strike and trying to check in with area control, I went through the ship-to-shore checklist and settled in for a 120-mile bingo. After the fifth attempt to check in, I started to get a little nervous. As it turned out, another Hornet from my sister squadron was about 20 miles behind me on the same profile. I clearly could hear them, but I couldn't talk to them; my radios wouldn't transmit. I would be OK as long as I followed him through the frequencies. I swapped my squawk from 7700 to 7600 and tried to tell area control that another plane out there wasn't talking to them and was also on a bingo profile. Control never caught on, and we switched up approach, who knew there were two inbound radar tracks and tried to

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Full Bucket

establish communications with both. Unable to transmit, I overheard the duty runway was 05, but they would clear runway 32 for landing.

Perfect, runway 32 was straight off my nose at about 20 miles. I planned a standard NORDO approach: flashing my taxi light and looking for ALDIS lamp signals. Everything seemed to be working out as it should. Too bad my luck would change drastically in the next 15 minutes.

I dirtied-up at 10 miles, flashed my taxi light, and rocked my wings. I planned to execute a go-around if tower was unable to ready the ALDIS light for my first pass. As it turns out, the tower saw me and tried to clear me to land with the lamp. Unfortunately, the airfield was building a new tower that should have been completed months earlier. When the tower supervisor got to the light, the uncompleted tower blocked my line of sight. I executed a waveoff and proceeded to the downwind for runway 32. On downwind, I looked toward the tower and received the much-anticipated signal: clearance to land.

Awesome! I still had 1,500 pounds of gas. I would have no problems stopping with a light jet, even with carrier-pressurized tires. In my exuberance, I dorked away the approach and landed long—between the lens and the short-field arresting gear. For those not familiar with the airfield, I landed with about 7,000 feet of remaining runway.

"No sweat…I'll just get on the brakes early and get this thing stopped in plenty of time," I thought. The pressure on the pedals was normal, but I wasn't slowing as fast as I should have. I was at 100 knots at the 6,000-foot board—faster than normal but still manageable. I was 80 knots at the four board and 70 knots at the three board. I was too fast and needed to stop, so I dropped the hook.

After dropping the hook, with 2,500 feet of remaining runway, I selected the emergency brakes. "I'll still catch the long-field gear, and I'll be set," I thought. I hook-skipped the long-field gear, and I was off to the races.

From what I remember, I had slowed to about 40 knots before I went off the runway. As I went off the end, I shut off both motors and moved my hands to the ejection handle. There weren't many lights at the runway end but still enough to break out a horizon. I decided to eject as soon as I felt a wing go down. Finally, the jet came to a stop about 150 feet off the end of the runway. Before the crash trucks got to the jet, I already was out kissing the ground, happy not to have ejected.

After composing myself, I thought about what had happened. I had made a handful of mistakes that were highlighted by some field-

maintenance issues. First, I was so busy trying to do the right thing and with being NORDO, that I didn't do the right thing for my emergency. I wanted to remain predictable and land on the same runway I had used for my initial approach. As I entered the downwind, I crossed over an intersecting runway that was much longer. I later learned it also was a duty runway. After executing the waveoff, I should have circled to land on the longer runway.

Next mistake. Although 1,500 pounds of fuel doesn't normally seem like much, it's plenty when dealing with an emergency at a VFR field. I had plenty of gas for two more approaches. When I noticed I wasn't slowing down like I should have been, it was time to go around.

Emergency brakes are free with two running engines. Once I made the decision to stay on deck and suspected the normal breaks weren't functioning properly, I needed to pull the emergency brakes and get on them. I put too much trust in the long-field gear. I discovered this trust was misplaced as we stopped by the gear on the car ride back to the hangar. It turns out the doughnuts that hold the wire off the deck were all out to the sides. The wire was flat on the deck where my hook had passed.

I did make one great save that evening. I shut off the engines as soon as they no longer were good to me. It would have been a Class A if I had FODed both engines. Thankfully, nothing was wrong with the engines, except some grass blades inside.

We only had been on the ship five days, and the same jet had prior braking issues. Just a week before, while coming back from a functional-check flight, the jet had had the same problem, and the pilot selected emergency brakes to slow.

Maintainers earlier had bled the brake system and signed off on the gripe. Before heading out to the ship, the brakes were checked at taxi speed and worked 4.0. So, what went wrong? The anti-skid control valve malfunctioned but didn't manifest itself at low speeds, below the anti-skid system's threshold airspeed. However, at speeds above taxi speed, the brakes badly failed. And, of course, when things are going downhill fast, you can count on something adding to the excitement, such as being NORDO.

Lt. Good flies with VFA-37.

Mishap-Free Milestones

VR-51	6 years (20,000 hours)
VAQ-133	7 years (10,000 hours)
VFA-22	7 years
VP-4	31 years (205,000 hours)
VFA-131	15 years (64,200 hours)
VRC-30	27 years (168,000 hours)
Marine Corps Air Station, Iwakuni, Japan	32 years (60,000 hours)
Naval Research Laboratory, Flight Support Detachment (NRLFSD)	40 years (62,000 hours)

4th MAW Units

HMLA-775	11 years (29,935 hours)
HMM-764	13 years (29,613 hours)
HMH-769	28 years (38,958 hours)
VMFA-134	7 years (23,485 hours)
VMFT-401	6 years (26,692 hours)
VMGR-234	27 years (107,943 hours)
VMFA-112	15 years (42,360 hours)
HMLA-775Det A	7 years (12,690 hours)
MASD	(48,205 hours)
HMLA-775Det A	3 years (6,452 hours)
VMGR-452	14 years (51,250 hours)
HMH-772	20 years (29,377 hours)
VMFA-321	6 years (15,537 hours)
MASD	22 years (55,568 hours)
HMM-774	33 years (62,693 hours)
HMLA-773	10 years (32,622 hours)
VMFA-142	24 years (65,317 hours)